

Lectures by Shyam Sundar Goswami

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The physical aspect of concentration

Not all postures are good and right for all things. Some are more suitable for certain purposes. For example, it is best for us to be lying down when we sleep rather than to keep standing like a horse. There are appropriate postures for everything.

Therefore, we ought to first discuss the body-position, sitting in the seat with an appropriate posture, as it is shown that certain postures are specially suited for exercising mental concentration. Here the first point is that the posture should be a cross-legged one (with the legs folded), lest no deep concentration be possible. Some may think that to sit with legs hanging would be more comfortable, but sitting for concentration is not merely for comfort. For concentration purposes, experience shows that the cross-legged posture is the only right one.

Each posture has its physiological aspect, which is what happens in the body when a certain posture is assumed. Some postures will involve more effort on the part of the muscles involved, while others will not be as strenuous. There is also a mental aspect involved with any kind of posture. This expresses itself as an oscillating pattern occurring in the mental field.

In the mental field there are three distinct phases: the unconscious, the semi-conscious and the conscious. The awareness aspect of consciousness may be fully understood if we take water as an example. When we drop a

brick or stone into water, vibrations are formed in proportion to the force and conditions involved and will continue indefinitely. The mind, which is the central power, may be likened to the falling brick, as mind-created oscillations occur in consciousness and continue indefinitely, except in deep sleep.

This is clearly realized in thoughts, as consciousness operates as an uninter-rupted, ongoing thinking process. This phenomenon causes a mental thought-accumulation, the first cause of which are *vayu* vibrations. These vibrations are ultimately reflected in the physical body. This phenomenon can be ascer-tained via the respiratory rate, which stands in proportion to the amount of work done and is thus another effect of the inner vibrations, or *vayus*. Body motions are the gross manifestation of mind oscillations and the yogic attempt to control these motions is achieved through what we call a yogic posture, or *asana*.

Very few people actually know what an *asana* is. *Asana* is the physical condition in which the body's motions, which are fundamentally produced by the oscillatory patterns in the mind, are controlled.

These body motions are of two kinds: 1) directly initiated by will, and 2) involuntarily or reflexively initiated, without will-created movements of the body. The reason for this is the fact that the mind's ongoing oscillations are constantly reflected outward to their end-limit, the body. Internal organs are also constantly active, which means that we have to additionally reckon with these organic factors when dealing with concentration.

Asana, then, is the pattern aimed at controlling both the body's motions that are elicited via our will, and those affected unconsciously as a result of mind's oscillations. Here we thus find a relation between the body's motions and an oscillatory mind.

It is quite possible to control the body's motions by controlling the mind. When we stop mind-oscillations, then the body becomes motionless. The method undertaken in Raja Yoga to achieve physical results begins directly via mind-control. This method is extremely difficult and rarely achieved. For most people, it is quite impossible. If motions really are effects of mind's activity, their cause must reside within the mind. How then can the movements of the body be stilled without removing their cause – the oscillations? Clearly, that is just what the Raja Yoga system teaches, but very few are successful in this effort to make mind or body motionless.

If we should try the opposite way, how then can the cause – the mind – be reached via the physical body? Will it be easier to influence the mind through the body? Moreover, it is not enough to keep the body motionless, as breathing-movements and internal motions such as the heart beating go on and on constantly. To stop these activities is usually quite beyond our reach. It would then seem that only the voluntary muscles can be kept quiet.

Hatha Yoga teaches that it is possible to grasp the mind through the voluntary muscles, while Raja Yoga says that the process should start from the mind. Thus, when the will is operated directly through the mind, that is Raja Yoga and when it works through the muscles, it is Hatha Yoga.

Hatha Yoga provides the possibility of influencing the mind via the motions. Whatever the theory, we also need practical directions. If movements are to influence the mind, how can this be done? Movements stem originally from the mind. Movements start as finer oscillations and only become motions at the end-point, which is the gross muscle. The directional flow of this process may be diagrammed as originating in the

mind (which we will call, "A") and then flowing toward the body (which we will call, "B"). So from A to B there is a flow, the cause of which lies in the mind. The line A to B is the downward vibratory pattern. It cannot reach the mind, as the subtle flow progresses towards the gross. Here the oscillation goes downward towards the physical movement which is the end-point, where B is the effect, and therefore cannot reach A. There is no possibility directly to reach A via B.

The only possibility, then, is to create a reverse motion (which we will call, "C"). We may thus turn B into C, and then from C move ahead to reach A.

As an example, we may mention the downward-moving peristaltic movements of the abdominal musculature. These movements can be made to turn upward, and thus become anti-peristaltic, thus illustrating the nature of the technique at hand. If B cannot reach A directly, then A may be reached by changing B into C. To transform the downward motion into an upward motion is the aim of Hatha Yoga, which in other words entails an upward reversal of downwardly directed movements (or anti-downward movements).

In the physical field there are several examples of this. In Hatha Yoga for instance, this reverse phenomenon is illustrated by the process of *vajroli*, insofar as it clearly displays a reverse motion in various phases.

It can be said that movement motions have two aspects – one normal function and its opposite, the reverse movement. Hatha Yoga teaches how to successfully start a reverse motion process and thereby reach the desired goal. However, to achieve this kind of advanced movement requires a perfect knowledge of the technique involved, much practice, determination and perseverance.

The yogic discipline offers various postures for mental concentration and *asanas* are the first step for harnessing those motions which are the effects of mental oscillations. To be helpful, a yogic posture supposes two conditions:

1) the acquisition of *sthira*, or calmness, and 2) *sukha*, or ease. Therefore, a particular posture is selected for regular practice and the pupil has to be patient until it becomes easy and painless. Only then can one expect real calmness.

Unless ease is firmly established, real calmness will not be attained. Hatha Yoga teaches therefore how to achieve that calmness so as to enable the reduction of grosser aspects (*sthula*) into finer (*bhutasuddhi*) ones. Hatha Yoga exercises deal primarily with the body, but when a fair control is achieved, then Laya Yoga or another Yoga form can be adopted for still more advanced training.